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INCOMING

ROUTINE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE
ARA/NEA REARCS

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ELECTIONS, NOW ALL SCHEDULED FOR DECEMBER 6. HE SAID IT IS TOO
LATE IN THE GAME AND TOO COSTLY TO HAVE TWO VOTING DAYS, BUT HE HAD
NO OBJECTION TO A CHANGE IN THE LAW TO ENSURE SEPARATION OF
ELECTIONS IN THE FUTURE. (COMMENT: A MAJORITY OF THE COUNTRY'S
GOVERNORS AND MAYORS ARE AD. MANY IN AD EXPECT THAT THEIR
PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE WILL TO SOME EXTENT RIDE THE COATTAILS OF
POPULAR OR ENTRENCHED STATE AND LOCAL OFFICIALS RUNNING FOR
REELECTION. END COMMENT.)

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REF: 97 CARACAS 4802

MAISTO

9. (C) AMBASSADOR RESPONDED THAT WE ARE FOLLOWING THE ELECTION
CLOSELY. OUR INTEREST, HE SAID, IS IN THE INTEGRITY OF THE
ELECTORAL PROCESS, BUT WE ARE OF COURSE NEUTRAL AS TO CANDIDATES
AND PARTIES. ALFARO NOTED THAT THE OUTCOME IS NOT LIKELY TO AFFECT
U.S. INTERESTS

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HUGO CHAVEZ'S "APOCALYPTIC VISION"

10. (C) HUGO CHAVEZ CANNOT WIN THE PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION. ALFARO
SAID, BUT HE COULD BECOME A SIGNIFICANT FORCE IN CONGRESS. ALFARO
COMPLAINED THAT THE MEDIA IS GIVING CHAVEZ'S "APOCALYPTIC VISION"
MUCH GREATER PLAY THAN IT DESERVES AND THAT "CERTAIN ECONOMIC
GROUPS," WHICH FEND TO PLACE THEIR BETS ALL OVER THE TABLE, ARE
FOOLISHLY SUPPORTING CHAVEZ. ALFARO SAID THAT AD'S RESPONSE TO
CHAVEZ IS NOT TO DISPUTE HIS DIAGNOSIS OF THE PROBLEM -- POVERTY,
CORRUPTION, INJUSTICE -- "BUT TO SAY THE ANSWER IS TO BUILD
TOGETHER, NOT TO DESTROY." CHAVEZ APPEALS TO VOTERS' DESPAIR,
ALFARO TOLD US, AND AD TO THEIR HOPES.

IRENE SAEZ "HEADED TOWARD AN ICEBERG"

11. (C) WITH RESPECT TO IRENE SAEZ, ALFARO SAID HER INEXPERIENCE
AND LACK OF A COHESIVE POLITICAL ORGANIZATION WILL INCREASINGLY
TAKE THEIR TOLL ON HER POPULARITY. "SHE IS LIKE THE TITANIC," HE
SAID. "A BEAUTIFUL FLOATING PALACE HEADED TOWARD AN ICEBERG." HE
NOTED THAT HER ANTI-POLITICAL PARTY BASE OF SUPPORT IS INNERNETLY
WEAK BECAUSE IT IS LARGELY MADE UP OF PEOPLE WHO DO NOT VOTE. HE
PREDICIED THAT, FOR LACK OF AN ALTERNATIVE, THE SOCIAL CHRISTIAN
PARTY (COPEI) WILL BACK IRENE BUT THAT COPEI IS TOO DIVIDED TO BE
EFFECTIVE IN THIS YEAR'S ELECTIONS. ALFARO ADDED THAT HE WAS ONE
OF SAEZ'S POLITICAL GODFATHERS, HAVING CONVINCED HER TO RUN FOR
MAYOR OF CHACAD THE FIRST TIME, AND THAT THEY REMAIN FRIENDS.

COMMENT

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